

Board of Visitors  
Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind  
June 10, 2010

**Call to order** - Chairman Senator Hanger called the meeting to order.

Members present: Senator Emmett Hanger, Delegate Steve Landes, Delegate Dickie Bell, Alice Frick, Donna Gateley, Jane McNeil, John Pleasants, H. Diane Sandidge.

Members absent: Virgil Cook, Ralph Shelman.

State staff: Doug Cox, DOE; John Eisenberg, DOE; Samantha Vanterpool, OAG.

School staff: Janice Rankin, Director of Operations; Nate McLamb, Director of Human Resources; Doug Wright, Information Technology; Jack Johnson, Principal of the Deaf Department; Carol Swindell, Assistant Principal of the Blind Department; Mary Murray, Director of Student Life; Becky Plesko, Director of Support Services; Kathy Campbell, Interpreter; Rachel Effinger, Interpreter; Vivian Jones-Smith, Administrative Assistant.

Visitors: Rachel Bavister, deaf alumni; Wayne Frick, deaf alumni; Darlene Coleman, VSDB Behavior Management Staff.

Senator Hanger welcomed everyone to the Board of Visitors meeting. He thanked Ms. Vanterpool, Attorney Generals Office, for her time and expertise, along with Mr. Cox and Mr. Eisenberg from the Department for Education. Delegate Bell was introduced as the replacement for Delegate Lohr who resigned his position.

**Approval of March 2010 minutes** - Delegate Landes moved to dispense with the reading of the minutes and to accept them as written. Motion was seconded by Ms. McNeil. Motion was passed.

**Appointments**

The Senate representative from the eastern district is still vacant. The appointment is made by the Rules Committee, and at this time the position has not been accepted by nominees. Senator Hanger is currently addressing this and is interested in hearing recommendations.

Delegate Dickie Bell was introduced and welcomed to the Board of Visitors.

Delegate Landes nominated Delegate Bell for the position of Vice Chair, motion was seconded. No other nominations were put forward. Ms. Frick moved to close nominations. Motion was seconded. Motion was passed unanimously. Delegate Bell will hold the position of Vice Chair.

Delegate Landes moved that the Board of Visitors go into closed session as pursuant to Section 2.2-3711 to discuss the appointment of the VSDB Superintendent. This motion was seconded by Delegate Bell. Delegate Landes then moved that the Board certify that only matters lawfully exempted from open session requirements under the Freedom of Information Act are discussed and only matters identified in the motion to have the closed session are discussed. Motion was seconded by Delegate Bell.

Senator Hanger moved that the closed session was conducted by the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act as mentioned above. Motion was seconded by Ms. Frick. All members responded in the affirmative.

Senator Hanger then moved that Dr. Nancy Armstrong be appointed Superintendent of VSDB through June 30, 2011. During this time the Board will work with the Department of Education (DOE) and Ms. Vanterpool to facilitate the transition from DOE to the Board. They will develop the job description and evaluation process for this position. Motioned was seconded by Ms. Frick and was passed unanimously.

## School Reports

*Current budget:* Janice Rankin reported that the school will finish out the year with almost \$10,000 left in the budget. The staff has been diligent in the use of supplies and electricity to help reduce expenditures.

*No Child Left Behind Grants:* The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind receive two grants under No Child Left Behind. Under Title II the school received \$21,000 for the 2010-11 school year. The distribution of this funding is as follows: \$3,000 for summer clinical work completed by staff to prepare for the school year; \$5,000 for conferences; \$8,000 for tuition reimbursement for teacher's continuing education to be Highly Qualified; \$4,900 to cover conference travel expenses. Under Title I the school received \$150,106 for the school year 2010-11. Title I money is for special education support, all student attending VSDB are covered under Title I. This money will pay for the Spanish teacher and SOL remediation/tutors; testing & training/workshops to insure teachers and aides are highly qualified; travel reimbursement for training; level three interpreters; medical and dental services for students who qualify; foreign language interpreters; an intern in the audiology department; text books and software; and devices for hearing and vision enhancement.

Following this information several questions were asked: Ms Frick wanted to have examples of technology used for the deaf. Dr. Plesko responded that FM systems are being used in preschool and kindergarten for the students to attach directly to hearing aids for amplification, smartboards and projectors are used to enhance the educational experience in the classroom. For example, students are able to use the smartboards to practice for SOL's. Delegate Landes was interested in how this technology has improved SOL scores. Dr. Armstrong emphasized that Title 1 funds cover the cost of technology for the classroom; 90% of the current budget is used for salaries which leaves no additional money to support technology in the classrooms. Delegate Landes asked if VSDB could provide the last five years of SOL scores to see the progress of students. Dr. Plesko responded that the information could be provided, but to truly understand the progress of the students at VSDB you had to look beyond the SOL scores. Many middle and high school students come to VSDB with no language; unable to read, write or communicate in American Sign Language. These students might not be able to pass the SOLs, but their ability to read, write and communicate has improved significantly which is not tracked by a standardized test. Dr. Armstrong assured Delegate Landes that the student's progress is being recorded and a report will be provided at the next board meeting. Senator Hanger added that with the investment of new facilities at VSDB the technology needed to also be upgraded to keep pace with the public sector. He would like to see VSDB as a leader in technology for the students and campus. Dr. Armstrong responded that the new facilities are being equipped with the newest technology, not only in the classroom but also in security. VSDB has an approved technology plan that maps the future upgrade of the facility. Delegate Bell expressed a concern with using SOL scores as indicators of Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). He agrees that the student's progress is not best depicted by SOL scores and is concerned with VSDB being marked down on AYP due to low SOL scores.

*Indebtedness of State Agencies:* Ms. Rankin advised the board that VSDB will not be in debt at the end of the year and the "Acknowledgement of Notification of Provisions of the Appropriation Act Relating to Indebtedness of State Agencies" form will be filed with the Department of Planning and Budget. A copy of bill 4-3.01, DEFICITS, was provided to the board.

*School year 2010-11 Budget:* It was requested a copy of the new budget be provided to the members of the board (Mr. Pleasants will be emailed a copy) for clarification. While copies were run, the meeting continued with the report from Nate McLamb.

*Performance Planning and Evaluation:* Mr. McLamb provided a copy of an extract of VSDB Policy HR005, Performance Planning and Evaluation, April 23, 2010 for review by the board. He explained this was the proposed procedure followed when a teaching contract was not renewed. This policy was developed under the guidance of Ms. Vanterpool and was worded to mirror the policy used in public school systems. The action of nonrenewal is initiated by the superintendent based on recommendations from the principal. Ms. Gateley requested clarification on the last sentence, "Probationary teachers whose contracts are not renewed due to unsatisfactory performance do not have access to the grievance procedure." It was explained that any employee, regardless of agency, in the probation period of employment with the Commonwealth does not have access to the Commonwealth grievance procedure. The procedure in VSDB Policy HR005 is strictly used under the direction of the Board of Visitors and for VSDB employees only.

Ms. McNeil requested the last sentence of the last bullet have the word "date" included to clarify the timing. Senator Hanger asked if Human Resources anticipated any nonrenewal of contracts before the next board meeting. Mr. McLamb responded in the negative. Senator Hanger asked if the VSDB Policy HR005 should be adopted. Mr. Pleasants moved the Policy be adopted with the addition of the word "date" as noted. Ms. McNeil seconded, motion was passed.

*Personnel Reductions:* Mr. McLamb covered the current reductions in staff due to budget cuts. VSDB had a \$1.5 million reduction in their operating budget, the following positions will not be filled: two teacher assistant in the deaf department; one residential advisor in the blind department; one campus police officer; one behavior management assistant; six teachers of the deaf & hard of hearing; one teacher in the blind department; one registered nurse; one assistant principal of the blind department; one part time teacher in the deaf department; one food service worker; one certified nursing assistant (wage); one teacher assistant in the deaf department (wage); one residential advisor in the deaf department (wage) with a total savings of \$839,697. These positions are still valid positions and may be filled in the future, if the budget improves. Ms. Gateley expressed a concern with the amount of teachers on the list and asked how many teachers were left on staff and why the deaf department had so many more losses. Mr. McLamb responded that there were 28 teachers with the deaf and blind departments combined, and though it appears the deaf department is taking a larger cut than the blind department, the blind department took a greater reduction in the 2009 reduction of staff due to cuts to the 2009-10 budget. Delegate Landes asked how many of the open positions were the result of a layoff. One teacher in the deaf department, one teacher in the blind department and the assistant principal of the blind department were laid off. A question was raised about the size of the classes. The board was informed that the average class size is small, from two or three up to eight students. The school meets all special education standards set by the state. Mr. Pleasants expressed a concern over the loss of the assistant principal in the blind department. He was assured that the school is establishing an instructional leader for the blind department and that Tanya Faidley, the current curriculum coordinator, will have her office in the Blind Department for supervision. There will also be lead teachers in each department.

At this time Ms. Rankin continued with the school year 2010-11 budget. The budget from the general assembly is \$10.2 million; VSDB receives an additional \$600,000 in the form of tuition payments from other school districts for a total budget of \$10.8 million. Of the current budget \$8.9 million covers salaries, wage employees, and benefits; \$1.6 million covers contract services including maintenance, VITA, and medical; \$364,000 for supplies and materials; \$2,000 for site improvements; \$6,300 for interagency transactions; \$108,000 for equipment; and \$375,000 for utilities. Discussion followed about the format of the spread sheet, past budget information to create a baseline of knowledge for future decision making, and the possibility of having the budget broken down into general and nongeneral funds.

*IT Update:* Doug Wright reports he is continuing to iron out details of the separation of the school domain from VITA. The equipment transfer is complete. He will provide more details at the next meeting as he will have several meetings in the coming weeks. The process has been generally positive. Delegate Landes asked if all students use technology for SOLs. Mr. Wright responded that all computers on campus including the computers in the dorms could be used, but the blind students do not use computers for SOLs. Dr. Armstrong commented on the separation of school and agency. VITA was charging VSDB the same amount even though most of the computers on campus are not used during the summer. VSDB has experienced problems with the level and quality of service provided by VITA and often seems to have more problems after VITA has worked on the system.

*Deaf Department Update:* Jack Johnson expressed his appreciation of the level of support the Board of Visitors is lending to the school. The deaf library continues to move into the new media center, being the larger of the two libraries it is taking longer. Monday, June 14, will be the last day for faculty for the summer. The deaf department will have 22 teachers next year, seven are deaf and fifteen are hearing. Of the nine teachers assistants returning five are deaf. Mr. Johnson related that he has a personal connection with many of the students who come to VSDB, the ones who fall between the cracks, and No Child Left Behind does not catch. They come to VSDB with no language skills labeled less intelligent or troubled. He states in most cases this is not accurate, they are smart, just not educated correctly. In his own past he was labeled MR until the fourth grade. He understands the frustration some of the students feel. He hopes the board will set in place a strategy that will allow VSDB to become a hub of support and information for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and the Blind and Visually Impaired. By supporting parent choice and creating an

outreach to the community many students will receive the education they need to succeed. He pointed out that often students come to VSDB from the public school system too far behind to catch up and earn a better diploma. They are not receiving the best appropriate education for them and are paying the price for the rest of their lives. Senator Hanger thanked Mr. Johnson for his insight and expressed a desire to work on this issue. Mr. Pleasants commented on short term programs for extra instruction for students who need to catch up, possibly summer workshops. Dr. Armstrong responded that the school is looking into short-term programs and summer programs, (in partnership with JMU or BRCC) once the construction is complete and there is money in the budget. Ms. Frick also voiced a concern about the age some students are admitted to VSDB. There is not time to work with the student and they, as a result, receive a diploma that does not reflect their true ability. This is not fair to the student. What can be done? Mr. Johnson responded that often parents do not know about VSDB until their child is in high school. He would like to see VSDB involved more in the IEP process so the parents receive information about our services from the start. Ms. Gateley informed the board that as a parent going through the IEP process it has been her experience that VSDB is mentioned as an afterthought at the end of the meeting with no further information offered.

*Residential Program:* Mary Murray requested to present next as her report follows the topic of conversation. Ms. Murray is part of the evaluation team that reviews perspective students. They are seeing an increase of students who have anger problems due to lack of communication with family, peers, and teachers. She brought to our attention the recent article in the newspaper about one of our graduates. His story represents a happy graduate that overcame the odds. And though this student did overcome the odds, when he came to VSDB at 16 years old, he had no language skills and had anger issues because he was unable to communicate basic needs or interact with peers. It takes a long time to learn language and appropriate actions, to learn how to not react in anger and instead use new communication skills. This process uses up resources from teaching to counseling. We are seeing an increase of applicants that at 15 and 16 already have criminal records due to anger related incidents. VSDB is a school, and not an institution designed to provide services to these students with criminal records. VSDB could have helped them when they were young before the lack of communication skills translated into anger and aggression. There are students who want to attend VSDB but we cannot accept them due to other problems, problems that stem from not being educated in the public school system. Delegate Landes asked if it was possible to identify the locations where there appears to be continuing issues with school systems who are not fulfilling the educational requirements and target those areas. Dr. Plesko voiced a concern that by targeting school systems it might have a more negative effect and stress the relationship between VSDB and the school system. Delegate Landes pointed out that you need to know where the problem is and what it is in order to address it. He did not mean to target the systems in a negative way, but to educate the system as to what VSDB has to offer.

*Blind Department Update:* Carol Swindell opened by sharing that before coming to VSDB she was in special education and unaware of VSDB and what it had to offer. She wondered if it was possible to send information to LEAs with information about the school. Ms. Swindell reported that she is very proud of the students in the blind department. They have worked hard and obtained a 100% pass on the writing SOL, and 90% - 95% on all others. The students have worked hard with tutoring after school to achieve these results.

Delegate Landes commented on the fact that Ms. Swindell was unaware of VSDB even though she was in special education. He asked if the school had a program to educate special education teachers about VSDB. He asked if it would be possible to use grant money to provide summer workshops and possibly target the areas that are struggling to provide services. Now that the school is under the direction of the Board of Visitors would it be possible to solicit private donations to help cover the cost of summer programs? Ms. Frick agrees that summer programs are a good idea, but mentioned that the Department of Education should also be involved in educating the local school systems about VSDB. This is an issue affecting the entire state. Senator Hanger requested this issue be included in future discussions.

*Enrollment:* Becky Plesko reported on current and future enrolment. Mr. Pleasants requested a copy of Dr. Plesko's report. The following was submitted by Dr. Plesko:

*VSDB ended the 2009-2010 academic year with 124 students. The class that graduated on June 4th included 19 students: 16 students from the Deaf department and 3 students from the Blind Department. The 19 graduates represented 15.3% of the student body.*

*Going into the 2010-2011 academic year, there is a total of 104 students enrolled. This number does not yet include students who have applied and but not started school at VSDB. The students can be broken down by age and department. In the Blind Department, there will be a total of 31 returning students. Within the Blind Department, there are 5 elementary school students, 5 middle school students, and 21 high school students. There will be 8 seniors in the Blind Department next year. If all 8 seniors graduated, it will mean 25.8% of the Blind Department is graduating next year.*

*In the Deaf Department, there will be a total of 73 returning students. Within the Deaf Department, there are 17 students in preschool - 5th grade, 19 middle school students, and 37 high school students. There will be 15 seniors in the Deaf Department next year. If all 15 graduated, that would mean 20.5% of the deaf department will be graduating next year. There are already 6 candidates for the parent infant program next year.*

*For the current 2009-2010 academic year, there were 19 new student enrollments. In the Blind Department, 7 new students enrolled, 1 student was accepted but did not enroll, and 1 student was not accepted. In the Deaf Department, 12 new students enrolled, 1 student was accepted but did not enroll, and 2 students were not accepted. Overall, students are not accepted at VSDB when their behavior or mental health needs exceed the services that are offered in educational settings. These students are often part of mental health or behavioral treatment programs or in need of that level of services.*

*For the upcoming 2010-2011 academic year, VSDB is still receiving calls and applications for new students. Thus far in the Blind Department, 1 elementary school student has applied and been accepted. Thus far in the Deaf Department, 2 students have been accepted (1 middle school, 1 elementary school), 1 student was accepted to a wait list pending staff resources, 1 student moved before the process was complete, and 2 students were not accepted. Again, students were not accepted due to concerns for the need for mental health services.*

The request from students with significant support needs is increasing. These students need one on one in an academic setting at this time. For this student to attend a residential program VSDB would have to set aside two staff positions, one for classroom and one for the dorm. (A possible third position would be required if the student needed observation/assistance overnight.)

Ms. Gateley asked how many positions were transferred to VSDB when the Hampton campus was closed. Mr. McLamb answered - VSDB received 45 new staff positions. In fiscal year 2009 nine and a half positions were lost due to budget cuts and this year an additional 18 1/2 positions were lost to budget cuts. The continued loss of funding for staffing is becoming a significant issue.

Ms. Frick asked why there were only two new deaf students this year compared with 12 new deaf students last year. Dr. Plesko responded that a prospective student must be referred by their local school division; it is not the choice of the parent. Even if a parent requests a referral to VSDB it is the decision of the Special Education Director from the local school district. Doug Cox from the Department of Education commented that a parent can approach the IEP team with a request for referral to VSDB, but it is the IEP team that makes the final decision. In the case where a parent contacts VSDB directly the VSDB admissions coordinator contacts the local school district for permission to send out application information.

*Foundation Update:* Nancy Armstrong reported that the process of creating a separate incorporation for the Foundation is almost complete. A board is being set up to manage the foundation. The BOV should have a representative on the Foundation Board. Referrals are still being accepted to the board.

*Construction Update:* Dr. Armstrong read a letter from Dr. Wright, Superintendent of Public Instruction, praising the ground breaking and ribbon cutting ceremony for Stuart Building. The Stuart Building will have storage in the basement for luggage on Friday and Sunday bus trips, the first floor is the student center and the top floor is the state of the art media center. The students have been enjoying the new facility. Footers are being poured for the new educational building. The foundation for the deaf dorm is complete.

Harrison Hall has been vacated and asbestos removal is under way to get ready for it to come down, then work will start on the new blind dorm. The new buildings will have air conditioning and state of the art technology. The front steps to Main Hall are having the grout reworked. The original joints were too low so they are being filled with an epoxy. The two stair ways from the upper campus to the deaf school are being repaired. Main Hall is receiving a new roof and gutter system. The copula on the chapel is being refitted with a new roof and glazing on the windows. Dr. Armstrong wanted to thank Kjellstrom & Lee, Ballou, Justice, Upton Architects, the Department of General Services and the Department of Education for all the hard work; it has been a great partnership.

**Set Meeting Dates** - Senator Hanger polled the board about scheduling set meeting dates for the year. It was decided that scheduling out more than three or four months was uncertain. The next meeting will be on September 23rd at 10:00 am in Main Hall of the VSDB campus. The December meeting will be set at the September meeting. Mr. Pleasants requested the December meeting be early enough to allow time to act on issues that may need to be put before the Legislature.

**Unfinished Business** - The letter will be finished with information about Department of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DDHH) and the Department of the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI). When the letter is finished a draft will be sent out by email. Discussion and approval of the letter will be at the September meeting.

#### **New Business**

*Authorization of Signature:* Nancy Armstrong informed the board of Superintendent's Memo #128-10, "Authorization of Signature in Absence of Division Superintendent". Nate McLamb and Janice Rankin will have authorization to sign in the absence of Dr. Armstrong. A discussion followed as to what kinds of documents are involved and if a member of the board should also have authorization. It was concluded that only documents that pertain to the day to day operation of the agency are included and a member of the board does not need to be on the list. Delegate Landes moved that Nate McLamb and Janice Rankin have authorization to sign in the absence of Dr. Armstrong. Mr. Pleasants seconded the motion. Motion was passed. The appropriate form was signed by Dr. Armstrong and Senator Hanger and will be filed with the Department of Education.

#### **Public Comment**

Rachel Bavister addressed the Board of Visitors. As a retired teacher and a substitute teacher as needed, Ms. Bavister is closely connected with VSDB. She stressed the importance focusing on the kids and not losing sight of why we are here. She wonders why there is not more publicity in local and hometown newspapers about the student accomplishments. VSDB would benefit from positive publicity about the students. Mr. Pleasants agreed with Ms. Bavister, that years ago there was more information published about the students. Delegate Landes asked if there was a person designated as the point of contact for media releases. All media releases come from the superintendent's office but there is not an individual assigned this duty. Doug Wright posts information onto the VSDB web site. It was asked if there were any laws in Virginia that would prevent publication of student accomplishments. Doug Cox answered that as long as the school has written permission from the parent there should not be a problem. This issue will be looked into by the school.

Meeting concluded at 12:45 PM.